



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Texas Appleseed

Update 1: This summer I'm interning at Texas Appleseed, a nonprofit public interest justice center that promotes social, economic, and racial justice. This internship is a dream-come-true: Texas Appleseed does amazing work in policy advocacy, and working here has reminded me of the reasons I came to law school. It's also made me confident that I can have a life and career that I'll love after graduation. So far, I've been able to research issues such as: higher education institutions withholding transcripts from students in debt, differential treatment of pregnant and parenting K-12 students, and the responsibilities of people with power of attorney who are responsible for managing someone else's money. And it's still the beginning of the summer! I'm looking forward to taking on different roles in a variety of projects over the next several weeks.

This internship was made possible in part by Equal Justice America, who helped fund this experience for me. Equal Justice America funds students working in public interest internships all over the country who are doing work to help protect the rights of others. Many of these internships are otherwise unpaid and supplemented by programs like Equal Justice America's.

There are so many barriers to justice for all, and one of them is that it's not feasible for a lot of law students to take on the financial debt of law school without paid summer internships and the promise of a well-paying job after graduation. I am so grateful to Equal Justice America and The University of Texas School of Law's support for making my dream of working in public interest law a bit more of a reality.

And here's one of the best parts of my internship: my fellow interns! They're all amazing people and I'm so grateful to be working alongside them and learning from them this summer. Thank you, Elena Luna, Anthony York, Crystal T., Meg Solley, and Ti'Ara Clark (and Armando Lizarraga and Lexi!)

Update 2: I can't believe I've already been at Texas Appleseed for 5 weeks! It feels like time has passed so quickly. A lot of the projects I get to work on are still ongoing. I was able to help with some data collection for



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our project on transcript withholding. It's interesting to see non-legal aspects to a project that takes an extensive amount of work from different fields. I'm sure there's so much more that I don't see, but I'm grateful to be able to be involved in several pieces of the inception of a project. I've also been able to work with my friend and fellow intern Crystal Tran to interview people who either work directly with or work in policy around pregnant and parenting youth in schools. We'll be interviewing several more people in the next few weeks, which should give us a general sense of what serving pregnant and parenting youth in schools actually looks like. It's been a fun investigation process, and I look forward to seeing what legal questions arise!

Update 3: As I mentioned in my last update, one of the projects I've been working on with my fellow intern Crystal Tran at Texas Appleseed is about pregnant and parenting youth in public schools in Texas. Over the past few weeks, we've been doing a lot of work on that project. We've interviewed several educators and policy advocates who work with or on behalf of pregnant and parenting students. They've all been passionate about their work and about creating the same opportunities for pregnant and parenting students that many other students might otherwise have. More than anything, though, it's made me admire all of the work that young parents and pregnant people have to put into making a future for both themselves and their children that includes a high school education.

We're still interviewing stakeholders, getting a more complete picture of what parenting as a teen looks like, and learning about what support is offered to these students. From there we'll be thinking about what kinds of projects could come out of this research. One of the things I like about Texas Appleseed is that they create different solutions for different kinds of projects, based on the need of the people they're trying to help. Because of that, we may not know exactly the structure of what this project will look like before I leave this internship. Although I won't be continuing with this project, I love how adaptive Texas Appleseed projects are. I also love that when Crystal and I pass this project off, more people will get to expand on this project, and make it a big collaborative effort. It's amazing to be a part of a larger movement toward social good, and I hope to be able to do work as meaningful with people as interesting in the future.

Update 4: Although the school year has already begun at Texas Law, I did want to post about the winding down of my summer internship at #TexasAppleseed. The project about pregnant and parenting youth took up the majority of my time at the end of my internship. @Crystal Tran and I continued to interview people who worked in pregnancy related services in public school districts. It was really fascinating to see all of the different ways that different school districts approached serving that population of students. Some districts house all of their services internally, and others partner with local nonprofits, hospitals, and community members. All of the districts we talk to have different ways to address problems that appear in the lives of their pregnant and parenting students, and all of them have passionate people working for those students. Of course, I think that the people willing to talk to us were generally the people who were really invested in their job and their students. We sent out dozens of emails, but only got seven or eight replies. Those who we did interview had a lot of insight into problems that these students face, and often had great solutions. Some of those solutions they



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implemented in their school district, and some of them were the solutions that they would implement if they had the funding for it. Their passion for helping students made all of our interviews really energizing and made me feel like this was an important project that I hope will continue on at Texas Appleseed after my internship ends.

Update 5: It's time for my final EJA Fellow Update! My first summer of law school at Texas Appleseed was great, and expanded horizons in the law, in policy, and in future career possibilities.

Looking back over the summer, I feel like I learned so much, and I am so grateful for my experience. I met many people among the other interns and Texas Appleseed staff who I admire and enjoyed working and interacting with. It was such an eye-opening experience to see what a real workplace that I would want to work in looks like. Meeting such wonderful people makes me excited to graduate and be able to work with people who are as passionate and kind as they are.

Texas Appleseed is working on so many amazing projects, and I got to learn about issue areas that I'd never even thought about before. Overall, I really enjoyed the policy-related work that I did, and I can see myself working in the legal policy field long-term. (Although there are still many law careers I can see myself pursuing.)

There are so many policy areas that need good advocates and lawyers, and I hope that the work I do will be a part of a force for good advocating for and representing people that will make this a more just society for all. I really enjoyed doing research on my main projects this summer: transcript withholding based on institutional debt and supporting pregnant and parenting youth in public schools.

For both of these projects, I researched the background and landscape of issues related to the field, identified those issues, and looked into potential solutions. It gave me good research experience and made me think creatively. A lot of ideal solutions wouldn't work in the real world, and I'm sure I still have a long way to go before I can understand and implement practical policy and legal solutions. But I really look forward to doing that work.

Thank you so much to Equal Justice America and the The University of Texas School of Law for making this experience a reality for me.